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REVIEWS

PROBLEMS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

The middle-aged school man who has achieved a comfortable routine and looks with complacent eye upon his smooth-running machine for turning out successful candidates for college entrance will experience a dreadful shock when he examines—if indeed he can be induced to examine—the latest book by the most radical of reorganizers. The earlier volume by the same writer, *Educational Readjustments*, together with numerous articles and reports, has made readers of educational literature familiar with many of Professor Snedden's views. His *Problems of Secondary Education*, however, marks a distinct advance in his program of reform.

The epistolary method which Dr. Snedden has adopted is novel in a book of this kind, but has distinct advantages, not the least of which are a directness of appeal and a freedom from dogmatism very desirable in the case of subject-matter so revolutionary. The persons addressed include a superintendent of schools, the president of a university, the chairman of a committee on college admissions, a college professor of education, the principal of a large high school, the principal of a small high school, a conference of secondary-school teachers, a teacher of Latin, a high-school teacher of English, a committee appointed to consider the intermediate or junior high school, and several others. Every aspect of secondary education now under discussion is reviewed.

In company with all scientific students of education, Dr. Snedden discards the theory of formal, or general, discipline, which holds that "it does not matter," as Mr. Dooley remarked, "what a boy studies so long as he doesn't like it." Instead, he would set up a large number of specific objectives of school work derived from a study of the physical, industrial, social, and cultural needs and opportunities of the people of our time and country. In the pursuit of these objectives some "hard" studies will be necessary and some relatively "soft" studies, and methods of teaching appropriate to these two types of activities must be developed. But no study should be required of all pupils merely because it is hard, since the discipline of strenuous effort can be amply provided for by

means of studies having direct utility in industry, business, or the professions. Latin and algebra, for example, should be elective, not required. English, social studies, physical education, and general science, on the other hand, should be required of all.

Our author's analysis of the English problem is interesting and typical. Secondary-school English, he says, includes two subjects with unlike aims, namely, *formal English* and *English literature*. The study of the first is expected to result in the power to do, to execute, to construct; of the second, in the power to discriminate, to choose, to appreciate. These two subjects require radically different methods of treatment—so different that it may be advantageous to place them in the hands of different teachers.

Important parts of the subject of formal English, moreover, have been, up to the present, nearly or quite neglected. Such are effective listening to English as spoken or read, silent reading, oral reading, and oral communication, each of which has a teaching technique of its own. The importance of these activities has been lost sight of in the common practice of devoting the lion's share of the attention to written expression.

As for literature, its aims have been ill-defined. Many teachers, fearful of the didacticism latent in a moral purpose, profess to be inculcating a love of art for its own sake. At the same time they themselves are not writers nor are they wide readers of contemporary writing. We shall probably come to see that the attainable object of literary study for the majority of boys and girls is the habit of reading with enjoyment the better pieces of contemporary writing, with the resulting social enlightenment. Rightly taught, literature will become the most important *liberal* study.

Dr. Snedden's frank challenge of existing practices, his rather startling outline for the reorganization of secondary education, will prove highly valuable to all who expect progress and who are willing to think. Vested interests will, of course, wax eloquently scornful, but so many of the changes suggested are already on the way that the burden of proof seems to lie upon the "standpatter."

J. F. H.